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ABSTRACT

Many topics have been discussed over the lifespan of CEDA (Cross Examination Debate Association) debate, but the topic of judge adaptation (debaters adapting to each judge) is consistently ignored. Lay judges normally do not comprehend the debate process. To many debaters, lay judges are the most difficult to adapt to. The biggest problem with using lay judges is the lack of a predetermined criterion to determine the winner. Inconsistency in judging philosophies is not new and is largely responsible for the inconsistent records of debate teams. Some judges have an "anything goes" attitude towards judging debate rounds. These judges, often referred to as "tabula rasa," should rethink their ways. Without any proper criteria, debaters are forced to do what they feel is necessary to win the round. Tabula rasa judges give the debaters the freedom to be undisciplined and make it more difficult for debaters to adapt to the judges. Debaters face a more difficult challenge when they break to "out rounds." One way for everyone to have a well-defined philosophy, one that debaters can know exactly, is for judges to complete a questionnaire on such topics as what the judge considers a voting issue, what he/she is looking for in a debate round and from debaters, and where they stand on specific topics. Debaters would be better off than they are now if lay judges were equipped with basic vocabulary, structure, a brief background of debate, and clear criteria to determine the winner of the round. (A sample questionnaire is attached.) (RS)

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Judge Adaptation from a Debater's Perspective

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Over the lifespan of CEDA debate and the CEDA yearbook, it is not surprising to discover the numerous topics that have been discussed, analyzed and theorized. Yet, of all the topic areas, one important topic is consistently ignored: judge adaptation. This leaves me to wonder why such a topic has been looked over. Is it because we do not deem this an important issue? Admittingly, judge adaption is not like topicality, which CEDA theory has established that if violated the team may be dropped. Yet, the team that does not adapt to a judge's characteristics and philosophies will most likely lose the round. Most lay judges do not have any comprehension of debate beyond what they think and believe the two teams are presenting. This is when debate rounds can be lost, not necessarily because the team's inability to debate properly, but rather the team lacked the comprehension to communicate to the judge properly. However, we should not simply be worried about lay judges. Many coaches judging rounds have different philosophies as to what they look for in debaters and debate rounds. This will lead to a discussion that separates the lay judges from the experienced judges.

To accomplish a thorough discussion on judge adaptation some important issues need to be addressed. The first issue is the underlying goal of hiring lay judges for tournaments. There appears to be a contradicting purpose of using these judges. The next issue is judging philosophies. Many debaters ask for a judging philosophy prior to the start of the round. Usually these vary drastically from one judge to another. The lack of a judging paradigm in CEDA debate has lead to sporadic debate records. By having consistency in the judging process, debaters will find it easier to adapt to each judge and coaches will find it easier to determine which teams need to be strengthened. Lastly, lay judges need to be consistent when determining which team receives a winning ballot. Some ideas will be proposed that will allow this to happen.

Lay Judges

Lay judges normally do not have any comprehension of the debate process. To many debaters these are the most difficult judges to adapt to. What debaters have to rely on is their communication and persuasive skills to convince a lay judge that their position is superior to their opponent's. This seems simple and straightforward, but at the same time it can be the most frustrating experience for a debater, especially the novice debater. This brings about a question of purpose. Is the first year debater to concentrate on strengthening debate structure and theory skills, or build upon persuasion and communication skills? Hiring lay judges indicates that the debate process is to be purely communicative, whereas experienced judges want to hear more structured advanced arguments. Because this question is not clearly defined, it is difficult for the debater to know exactly what is needed to win the round. Should we just leave it as persuasion and communication skills with lay judges and structure and theory with experienced judges?

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A closer look will indicate further why it is difficult to debate in front of lay judges.

With the lay judge's lack of comprehension for the debate process comes further concerns. Few lay judges are able to flow properly. Most do, however, take primitive notes as a record of the debate round. As important as it is for the debaters to flow the round properly, so to is it for the judge. Without taking proper notes, judges have no way to compare, measure or weigh arguments. When a round is close, or when the round has evolved into a round of quality versus quantity of evidence, this is when proper note taking is essential to determine the winner. This is another frustration for a debater. Not only does a debater have to worry about the judge recording new arguments in rebuttals, but also about the judge giving weight to arguments that have no impact.

The biggest problem from using lay judges has to be the lack of a predetermined criteria to determine the winner of the round. Often times the lay judge will admit that he/she has no debate experience and leaves it at that. To one judge the criteria for winning the round may be the team that confused him/her the least--to another it might be the team that gives the best presentation. What are we expecting from the lay judges we hire? Do we give them a specific criteria in which to determine the winner? If the lay judge does have a criteria it is often not communicated to the debaters. This then leaves the debaters relying on the old faithful persuasion skills to get them through the round. Yet, debaters deserve more. They deserve a specific criteria in which they understand how they can win the round, rather than trying to guess what the judge really wants to hear.

Adapting to lay judges, or any judge for that matter, is not impossible. It is no different from adapting yourself to be in a professional manner one moment, and then being with your best friend the next. The one thing that separates this example from what debaters face is that we know our friends well, and know exactly how to act to please them when we are with them. Because debaters do not know lay judges, and because lay judges have no specific criteria, it is often frustrating trying to please them enough to receive a winning ballot.

Judging Philosophies

A judging philosophy should be specific and well defined. Yet, as simple as some judge's philosophies are, they don't tell the whole picture. Some judges view topicality as the main voting issue in the round, others will only see it as one of many voting issues. Some judges will weigh the round purely on-balance, while others will weigh the round according to the weighing mechanism argued in the round. This inconsistency in judging philosophies is not a new phenomenon. It is largely responsible for the inconsistent records of debate teams.

A 1984 article James Hallmark wrote for CEDA Yearbook addressed the issue of judging paradigms. It is time that the issue is addressed again. What Hallmark was proposing was that judges be consistent when handing out winning ballots. This would certainly make judge adaptation much easier for all debaters. If everyone stood on the same ground on such topics as jurisdictional arguments, criteria, off-case and quantity of evidence, rounds would be less stressful, more focused, and more beneficial to all.

To review that 1984 article, Hallmark created a seven question survey and mailed it to various debate coaches in the mid-section of the country. To demonstrate judging inconsistency, one question asked for either an affirmative win or negative win based upon this question: "Negative ignores case structure and spends both constructives giving off-case arguments. Affirmative does not defeat these arguments. From the information given, I would be most inclined to vote for..." 62% of the respondents agreed that the negative team deserves the winning ballot. It would follow that from debate's many rules and its structure that 100% agreement would be made with this question and any other question of its type.

This judging inconsistency makes judge adaptation for the debater nearly impossible. The only way a debater could compensate for this inconsistency is to drill the judge with scenario type questions. Only then could a debater truly know how to win the round and what to expect from the judge.

Tabula Rosa

Some judges have an 'anything goes' attitude towards judging debate rounds. These judges, often referred to as tabula rosa, should rethink their ways. The debater does not benefit in any way by arguing in front of a tabula rosa judge. There are four points that need to be addressed regarding this type of judging.

Tabula rosa indicates that one does not have any predetermined criteria for determining the winner of the round. This is similar to the situation discussed with lay judges. Without any proper criteria, the debaters of the round are forced to do what they feel is necessary to win the round. This then will end in an unstructured and unfocused round. Voting issues will be weak. What possible benefit could come from this?

Tabula rosa judges gives the debaters the freedom to be undisciplined. This is a contradiction, for the debate process is a communication discipline in itself. By establishing rules and theory, CEDA debate can not be undisciplined. This is much like the analogy of an undisciplined child. If a parent allows complete freedom for that child, often times the end result is pure chaos. Society has established proper conduct, parents establish proper conduct, why then should the debate process not be disciplined for a specific conduct?

Someone who claims that they are tabula rosa needs to explore exactly what they mean. To be truly tabula rosa, to allow 'anything goes', one would have to forego all and every bias in that round, against the debaters, and for the debate topic. Surely, no one could possibly accomplish this. To be completely bias free, one would have to have no frame of reference for the debate process or for the resolution. But once one heard a round on the resolution, they have already started a frame of reference of the debate process and the resolution.

The final point to be made regarding tabula rosa judges is that it makes other rounds more difficult for debaters to adapt to judges. It is quite an extreme for a debater to argue for a tabula rosa judge, and then the next round to debate in front of a CEDA founder. It is much like that

undisciplined child going to grandma's house where he/she is expected to very disciplined. It is going to be rather difficult for that child to adapt, much like it will be for the debater.

Out Rounds

Debaters face a more difficult challenge when they break to out rounds. Here they not only realize that their competition is stronger, but also that they have three judges to try to please, or at least two of the three. Debaters face a nightmare when they get one judge from each philosophy--one lay judge, one tabula rosa, and one traditionalist. This puts the debater in quite a dilemma. Who do they try to please the most?

The normal scenario in out rounds is that debaters try to appeal to two judges, leaving the other judge out of the round. When this happens, the debate process has turned away from the communication process. By focusing on two judges, hoping for their ballots, the other judge feels inferior to the other judges, which should not be the case. Debaters may not realize their intentions, but as judges, this action can be corrected.

Proposal

There is an old saying, "If you are going to complain, you voluntary yourself to find a solution." In this case, discussion replaces complaining, and a few ideas will start the process of finding a solution to judging inconsistency. This proposal is purely from a debater's point of view of what could possibly be done to solve the CEDA inconsistency. It is to act as a tool for discussion. The impacts from finding a solution will result in fewer random bullet ballots, more focused and structured rounds, easier judge adaptation for debaters, an enhance of the educational function of debate, and less frustration and more enjoyment from both debaters and judges. It would be imperative then, that a solution be created.

We should recognize that a solution will not come easy or quickly. Because CEDA has not yet established hard and fast rules regarding theory arguments and structure, we must argue among ourselves what is an absolute voting issue, when the affirmative team wins or the negative team wins. 100% agreement is going to be nearly impossible. Let it be accepted now, but try to reach a high percentage of agreement on these topics.

Perhaps what really needs to be accomplished is a clear definition of why CEDA debate was established, and its goals and purpose. To do this, CEDA founders would have to discuss their intentions and then go from there. Since it was their intent to create CEDA they should have the authority to decide what is a voting issue, and when an affirmative team or negative team should win, and what type of arguments should have the most weight. This will leave many out of the decision making process, however, it is logical that we are a product of those founders--their best interests are CEDA's best interests.

For now there is a way for everyone to have a well-defined philosophy, one that debaters can know exactly how to address the judge properly. It consists of the creation of a questionnaire that lets debaters know exactly where a judge stands on a wide range of debate

topics and issues. This should be in written form so that the debater can have it at all times, and that nothing is left out from a verbal interpretation. The questionnaire would address such topics as what the judge considers a voting issue, what he/she is looking for in a debate round and from debaters, and where they stand on specific topics. A sample idea has been constructed. (See appendix).

Lay Judge Proposal

Lay judges are going to be an inevitable part of the debate tournament process. They serve the dual purpose of filling the need for hired tournament judges, and to act as a checks and balance of the debate process. Sometimes debaters forget that the debate process is a communication process. Often times the debate becomes too focused on debate structure and theory issues and away from the act of communicating. Lay judges focus our attention back towards the communication process of debate.

However, this does not solve a frustration from a debater's perspective of having a lay judge vote for a team that did not present a prima facie case. The negative team pointing this out should win the round, however, a lay judge normally would not recognize it as a negative ballot. Because of the lay judge's lack of comprehension of debate, they do not know the rules that govern debate. If we equipped lay judges with basic vocabulary, structure and a brief background of debate we would be better off than where we are now. This will give lay judges enough knowledge to feel confident about voting for the winning team. This will also ease the debater. They no longer will be dropped because of the lay judge's lack of knowledge, and also they will spend less times in constructive speeches explaining the debate process to the judge.

The most important thing that lay judges need is a clear criteria to determine the winner of the round. As discussed earlier, lay judges may have a criteria all their own. Establishing a universal criteria for lay judges will solve two concerns. First, it will give a consistent criteria for determining the winner. Since it will be an universal criteria, it will not vary from one tournament to another. This will solve the second concern. This will give debaters one criteria that they have to adapt to, not many different ones.

Conclusion

We do have to give debaters credit. They somehow manage to adapt to each judge in the round. As stated earlier, judge adaptation is not an impossible concept to grasp. What does make it difficult, however, is the CEDA inconsistency. From this debater's perspective, when we decide to address this phenomenon and try to correct its mayhem, judge adaptation will be simple and straightforward. This proposal appears as if it is proposing that all judges be exactly alike. It does establish conformity as guidelines for determining the winner is concerned, but each judge's personality and characteristics will still play a role in distributing speaker points.

Appendix A

What are you looking for in a debate round?

List a hierarchy of voting issues.

How do you distribute speaker points?

How much weight do you give to the following?

Topicality	Most	Consideration	Little
Criteria	Most	Consideration	Little
Weighing Mechanisms	Most	Consideration	Little
Off-Case	Most	Consideration	Little
Definitions	Most	Consideration	Little
Quantity of Evidence	Most	Consideration	Little
Impacts	Most	Consideration	Little
Other jurisdictionals	Most	Consideration	Little
Stock Issues	Most	Consideration	Little

How do you view this debate topic?

Bibliography

James Hallmark, "Towards a Paradigm for CEDA," CEDA Yearbook, 1984, p. 89-92.